

Against all logic, the city's German population was rounded up but later released. Not surprisingly, the air of suspicion also fell on *Imo's* survivors who were mostly Norwegian. Their language and appearance appeared to many as being no different from that of Germans. Therefore, the officers and men were put in protective custody aboard HMS *Highflyer* for their safety as were the ship's personnel of *Mont Blanc*. This did not stop the military authorities from arresting the severely injured *Imo* wheelsman, John Johansen, from his bed at Bellevue Hospital, and charging him with being a suspected German spy. He was thrown into prison, kept under guard and threatened. The helmsman was soon set free and exonerated through efforts by Charles Jost Burchell, KC. A subsequent letter of apology from Major General Benson stated that the whole matter had been a case of mistaken identity.

Following the United Kingdom's declaration of war on Germany, Canada had thrown its full support behind Britain in the war effort but a great number of French Canadians in the province of Quebec led by Henri Bourassa were bitter opponents of conscription, a method used to replenish the fallen soldiers. During the 1917 Conscription Crisis, Prime Minister Borden "solved" the problem by introducing the Military Services Act, soon passed by Parliament. Tensions continued to remain high between the rest of Canada and Francophones who were looked upon by many as traitors because of their views and actions. Anti-French Canadian sentiment was no less prevalent in Halifax at the time of the explosion. That the majority of *Mont Blanc's* officers and men came from France did not seem to make any difference to the general public. Members of both crews would be called as witnesses at an inquiry into the cause of the collision in the harbour set to begin on 12 December in Admiralty Court (the Exchequer Court of Canada). The proceedings were initiated by the minister of marine and fisheries and de facto head of the Naval Service, Charles Colquhoun Ballantyne, a recent Borden appointee with little qualifying experience. The government's purpose in forming the inquiry was to not only determine the cause or causes of the collision between the two ships, but to also pave the way for a takeover of the port as in other Canadian cities. A Royal Commission to investigate the pilotage and its administration convened in February of 1918. Regarding the Wreck Commissioner's Inquiry, the matter of legal jurisdiction was restricted solely to Canada with none over the governments of France, the United States or Great Britain. Therefore, no Royal Navy officers from Halifax or New York would be called as witnesses. Any punishment of *Mont-Blanc* personnel, with the exception of the Canadian pilot, would ultimately be imposed by the government of France.